

ASK THE EXPERTS

OUR PANEL ANSWERS YOUR CULINARY QUERIES, FROM WHERE TO EAT IN KRAKOW TO DRINKING CACHAÇA IN SÃO PAULO

GOT A FOOD QUESTION?

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THE EXPERTS



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I'm planning a weekend in Krakow – what and where should I be eating?

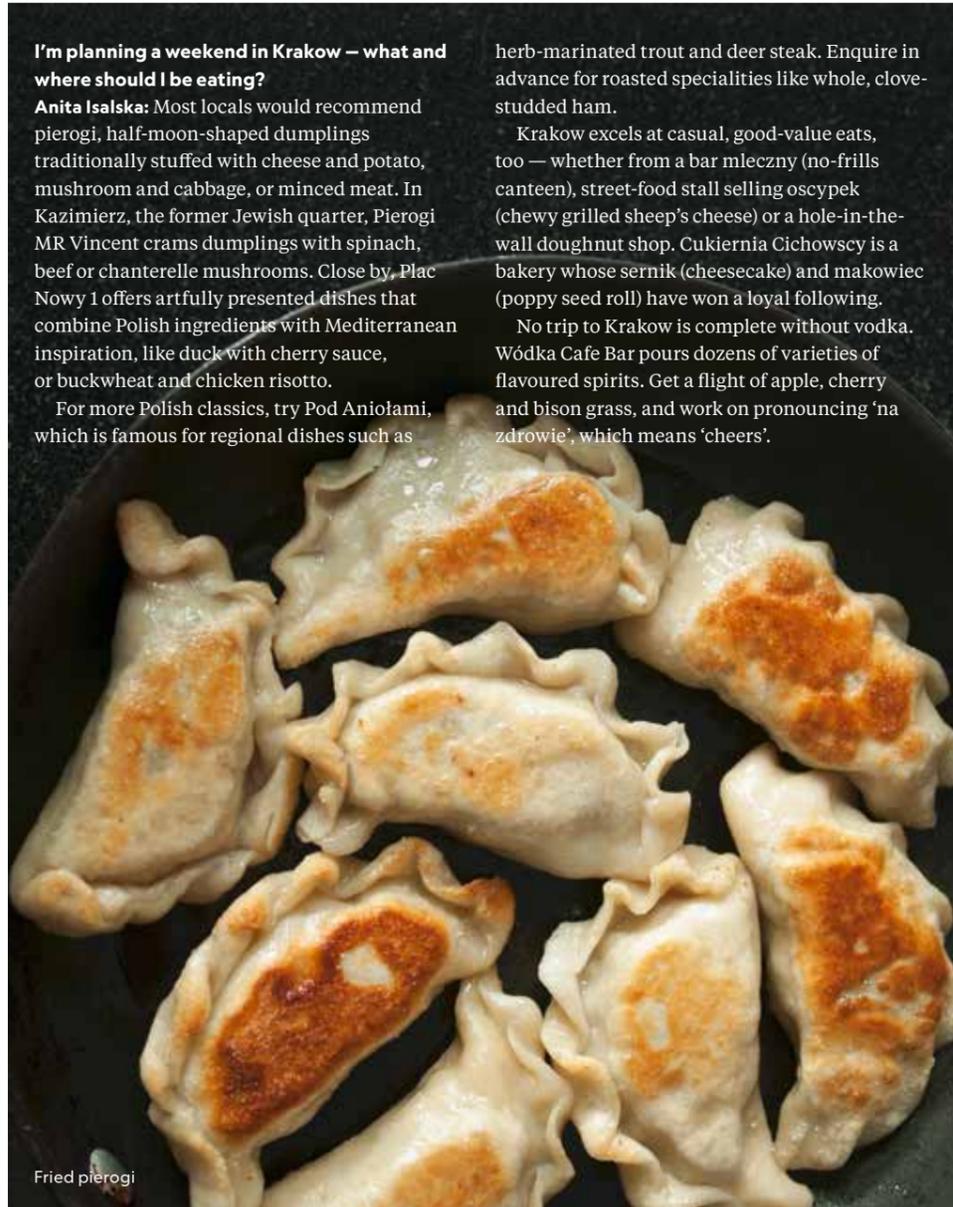
Anita Isalska: Most locals would recommend pierogi, half-moon-shaped dumplings traditionally stuffed with cheese and potato, mushroom and cabbage, or minced meat. In Kazimierz, the former Jewish quarter, Pierogi MR Vincent crams dumplings with spinach, beef or chanterelle mushrooms. Close by, Plac Nowy 1 offers artfully presented dishes that combine Polish ingredients with Mediterranean inspiration, like duck with cherry sauce, or buckwheat and chicken risotto.

For more Polish classics, try Pod Aniołami, which is famous for regional dishes such as

herb-marinated trout and deer steak. Enquire in advance for roasted specialties like whole, clove-studded ham.

Krakow excels at casual, good-value eats, too — whether from a bar mleczny (no-frills canteen), street-food stall selling oscypek (chewy grilled sheep's cheese) or a hole-in-the-wall doughnut shop. Cukiernia Cichowscy is a bakery whose sernik (cheesecake) and makowiec (poppy seed roll) have won a loyal following.

No trip to Krakow is complete without vodka. Wódka Cafe Bar pours dozens of varieties of flavoured spirits. Get a flight of apple, cherry and bison grass, and work on pronouncing 'na zdrowie', which means 'cheers'.



Fried pierogi

Where can I try traditional scouse?

Jade Wright: Every Liverpudlian knows where the best scouse is — in their mum's kitchen. It's a simple, hearty stew originating from the ports of Northern Europe, where sailors would warm their bones with brimming bowlfuls. Lobsouse, as it was originally known, also gave Liverpudlians their nickname, scousers.

Most of the ingredients in this dish are relatively affordable: meat, potatoes and other vegetables. While most people use lamb, some swear by beef, but there's also 'blind' (meatless) scouse for vegans and

vegetarians. Regardless, it's always served with chunks of bread and pickled red cabbage or beetroot.

Maggie Mays on Liverpool's Bold Street has been serving minced beef scouse for decades; the dish is so popular it's now even sold in tins, so the Liverpudlian diaspora can always enjoy a taste of home. Piazza Cafe at the Metropolitan Cathedral dishes up steaming bowlfuls of scouse, while The Welford restaurant at Liverpool Cathedral serves a rich lamb and vegetable version. In the hip Baltic Triangle district, Fodder offers three varieties of scouse, and Skaus Kafe holds its own, too.



Traditional Brazilian caipirinha
(cachaça, lemon and sugar)

I'm going to São Paulo and want to try cachaça — any tips?

Catherine Balston: Cachaça, known as 'pinga', is a Brazilian spirit made by distilling fermented sugarcane juice. It dates back to the 16th century, when Portuguese settlers began planting sugarcane to fuel Europe's insatiable appetite for the sweet stuff.

In the early 1900s, industrial-scale production, with its chemically controlled fermentation and continuous distillation methods, created a cheap, harsh colourless spirit. However, a more artisanal approach has become popular of late, using natural fermentation followed by distillation in copper stills to create a higher-quality, complex cachaça.

In recent years, São Paulo has seen specialist shops and bars opening up to cater to discerning drinkers. Cachaçaria SP is among the newest, selling a vast range of cachaças within the city's Edifício Copan building; Empório Chiappetta, at the Mercado Municipal market, also stocks an impressive array.

White, unaged cachaça is usually drunk as an aperitif or in caipirinhas — Brazil's national cocktail. Princesa Isabel distillery, in Espírito Santo state, produces Aquarela, one of the best unaged cachaças in the country. Maria Isabel, a distillery in Paraty, in Rio de Janeiro state, also produces award-winning cachaças.

In São Paulo, cachaça can be found at every bar, but for a good choice of artisanal labels, look for cachaçarias — specialist cachaça bars, such as the lively Rota do Acarajé in the Santa Cecília district.

In the UK, good cachaças from small producers are hard to come by, but Yaguara Cachaça produces a range of white and aged blends that are relatively easy to find.

Can you recommend a recipe for a traditional Ghanaian peanut soup?

Fran Osseo-Asare: This traditional West African soup is one of Ghana's most popular dishes. It's commonly made from a basic chicken stock, but can easily be adapted to a vegetarian version. You can cook and serve the okra separately, if you like, to allow people to choose whether or not they add it. The soup is traditionally served with fufu (boiled yams), or omo tuo (rice balls), but boiled potatoes or thick slices of wholegrain bread are also easy accompaniments. To turn this into a peanut stew, simply add a smaller amount of water.

SERVES: 5-6 TAKES: 1 HR

INGREDIENTS

1.5kg bone-in chicken parts, skin and fat removed
2 medium onions, chopped
2-3 garlic cloves, minced, pressed or ground
1 heaped tsp fresh ginger, grated or blended
1½ tsp salt (or to taste)
at least ¼ tsp dried ground red pepper, to taste (or fresh hot chili pepper)
300g canned chopped tomatoes
1-2 tbsp tomato paste
½ -1 cup smooth, natural-style peanut butter (no added sugar)
225g fresh okra or 140g frozen okra, topped and tailed, and left whole or chopped
chopped spring onions, to garnish (optional)
mini rice balls, to serve

METHOD

- Put the chicken pieces into a heavy pot with half the onion, the garlic, ginger, salt and ground red pepper and 120ml water. Cover and steam over a medium-low heat for 10 mins, making sure the water doesn't cook away.
- Blitz the chopped tomatoes in a blender to achieve a smooth consistency, then stir into the chicken mix with the tomato paste, the remaining onion and 1.2 litres of water. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to a simmer.
- Ladle 2 cups of the chicken broth into a medium saucepan, then mix in the peanut butter. Set over a medium heat, stirring constantly, until the oil separates and rises to the surface (around 15-20 mins).
- When the oil has begun to separate out, ladle some more of the broth into the peanut sauce. Mix, then carefully pour the peanut sauce into the chicken broth and stir.
- Allow the soup to simmer for 20-30 mins more until the flavours blend and the chicken is cooked. After a few minutes, add the okra. Top up with more water for a thinner consistency, if desired, and season to taste.
- Skim off any oil that rises to the surface. If the soup isn't going to be eaten immediately, scoop out the chicken pieces to prevent them overcooking, then return them to the soup in time to heat them through. Garnish with the spring onions and serve with rice balls and dried ground red pepper or red pepper flakes, for added spice, if you like.

